

# TOMATOES IN MY LUNCHBOX

## Activity Kit

This activity kit includes a letter from the author and a quick activity to do with your young one!

### A letter from the author:

Dear Reader,

*Tomatoes in My Lunchbox* was one of those rare manuscripts that came to me all of a sudden and all at once. That's not to say it came out shiny and polished or even remotely publishable (of course it didn't!), but it did come as a complete story, a story that flowed straight through my heart and onto the page. Writing the first draft felt like an alignment—something shifted, slid, and clicked into place. And it cracked me wide open.

Even though *Tomatoes in My Lunchbox* is, in many ways, a baring of the soul, I should clarify that the main character in this story is not me. She is parts of me: I do have a name that is tricky, my mom did put a whole tomato in my lunchbox, and I did make a mess of my school uniform eating it. I also made my first friend, Nishma, by copying what she did on that first day of school. But this little girl, the main character in *Tomatoes in My Lunchbox*, is so much more than a mini-me echoing my experiences. She is my mother's immigration story, my daughters and their relationships, the new students in my classroom looking lost and afraid, and she is story after story of disconnection and displacement. The very stories of displacement that are playing out in the lives of so many children, and grown-ups, right now.

At the heart of this book there is love and there are relationships, friendships, and connections. There is hope. This is a story about reaching out to connect with others in whatever small way you can: a first smile, a gesture of sharing, finding common ground. Through it, I too am reaching out to connect with you, dear reader. Perhaps there is something here that resonates with your own experiences, or maybe there is something that you recognize from your experience of others. Whatever your connection, however you read it, I hope it speaks to you in a voice that you needed to hear. I hope it whispers of hope and love and feeling like you belong.

Yours, from the heart,

**Costantia Manoli**

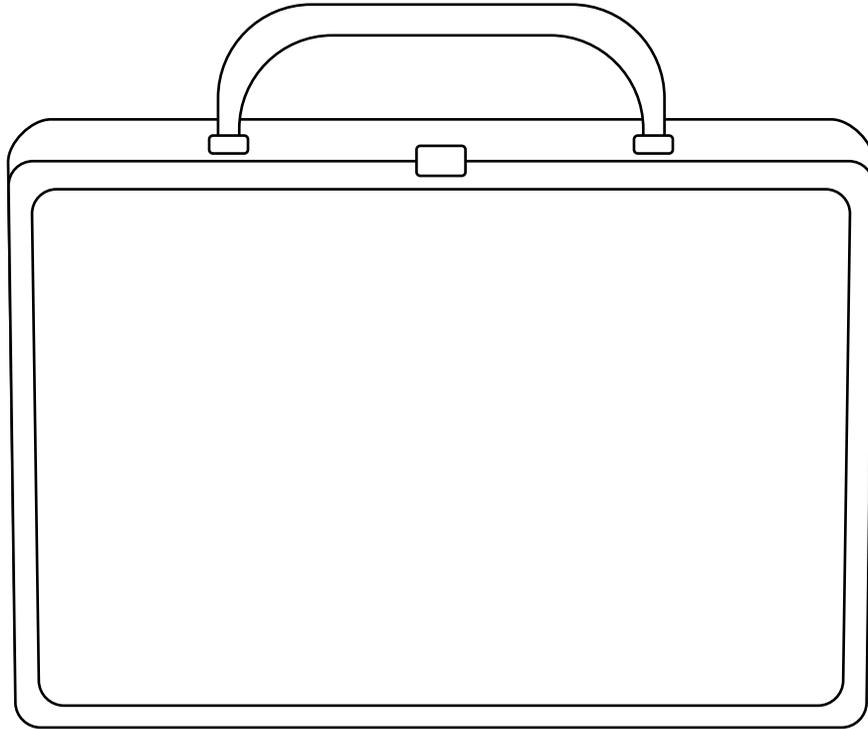


*Tomatoes in My Lunchbox* by Costantia Manoli; illustrated by Magdalena Mora | Ages 4–8

 An imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group

# What's In Your Lunchbox?

In *Tomatoes In My Lunchbox*, the main character eats tomatoes for lunch at school. Tomatoes are an important food in her culture. Think about the foods you bring in your lunchbox!



1

In the lunchbox above, draw and color a food that is important to your family or your culture.

2

In the story, the main character says that tomatoes “taste like home.” Why does the food in your lunchbox remind you of home?

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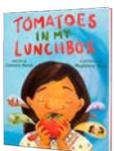
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3

Look around at the food your classmates drew inside their lunchboxes. Ask one friend why their food feels like home and write down what they said.

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